

Design Recommendations 8



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 8.1: These setbacks are appropriate for the building type and adjacent buildings.



400 West Main Street, Round Rock, Texas

Figure 8.2: An office suite that has a “residential look”

The purpose of this chapter’s design recommendations is to assist property owners, developers and designers in creating projects that are consistent with the character that the neighborhood wants to preserve and perpetuate; for example, the residential styling of many of the office buildings that exist in the Plan Area. The design recommendations included in this chapter apply to the portion of Southwest Downtown Plan Area (Plan Area) that is recommended for rezoning to Mixed-Use (MU-1). Designing for a mixed-use district at the scale of a traditional neighborhood requires attention to design and detail to ensure compatibility between various types of land uses and buildings. This chapter aims to define an approach to mixed-use design. Although many of these design approaches are characteristic of traditional design, they are not meant to dictate a particular architectural style but rather an appropriate scale and level of detail that encourage disparate uses to coexist harmoniously.

During Southwest Downtown public workshops, preferences to retain a residentially scaled neighborhood were expressed on numerous occasions. The following strategies could be used to accommodate design at a residential scale:

- Establish setbacks that are appropriate for the building type and adjacent buildings.
- Encourage structures other than civic buildings have a “residential look” so that their scale is appropriate for the neighborhood.
- Preserve large trees.

In public workshops, neighbors examined issues of height, setbacks, buffering and compatibility between existing and new uses. These elements will be addressed in the proposed MU-1 Zoning District via a set of development standards for new development and for expansions to existing development. The intended use of the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance is to implement density and design standards, originally during the City’s site plan development process. Additionally, proposed ordinance design guidelines are explained in-depth in this chapter to further address the desires of the neighborhood and meet the goals of the Southwest Downtown Plan (the Plan).

Building design issues highlighted in this chapter:

- Height
- Setbacks
- Buffering
- Compatibility

8.1 Providing a Mixture of Uses

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Land Use), “mixed-use” refers to multiple uses that are permitted on the same lot, or even within the same structure. In the Plan Area, new commercial development could provide local services; however, the Plan Area could grow to become destination-based, where people come from outside the neighborhood to shop, eat at neighborhood restaurants, use local services and explore entertainment options. The expansion of the Municipal Office Complex will add significant numbers of people in the Plan Area during business hours. In addition to the housing and commercial uses that already exist in the Plan Area, new housing, open space and commercial development will provide the mix of uses desired by the neighborhood. Examples of mixed-use development are shown to the right.

Residential uses are a major component of mixed-use development. The proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance will continue to allow new single-family development, but additional types of residential development will also be permitted. These residential uses include townhouses, upper-story residences, and live/work units. Design standards specific to these uses will be included in the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance.



Santana Row, San Jose,



Downtown Palo Alto, California



McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas

Figure 8.3: Examples of mixed-use buildings



Elton Lane, Austin, Texas



Texas Street, Portland, Oregon

Figure 8.4: Row houses are defined as individual units connected at the sides by common walls with private access to each unit from the street. Units often have a narrow front façade with parking in the rear.



Fort Road, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Figure 8.5: Two floors of residences over ground-floor retail.



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 8.6: Residences over shops. The façade details make a few large shops appear to be many small ones.

For townhouses, some of the standards which could be included in an ordinance are listed below. Images provided to the left illustrate examples.

- Townhouses should be designed in a “row house” form. Row houses are multiple housing units built adjacent to one another with common walls and separate access to each unit from the street. These units are often 2 or 2½ stories tall with raised front steps off the sidewalk to access the main entrance. Units often have a narrow front façade and rear parking access.
- The front building setback could be reduced to engage the pedestrian on the sidewalk. For residential buildings, visual privacy can be improved by raising the entrance and main floor level at least four feet.
- The length of walls facing a public street could incorporate vertical divisions in order to reduce visual building bulk. Building offsets and individual roof lines, separated by recessed entries, could also help to define individual units.

For upper-story residences, the ground floor of the building would be occupied by non-residential uses with apartments on the upper floor or floors of the building. For single-story structures, one residential unit could be permitted on the ground floor in addition to the commercial uses. Residential units of a building should have separate entrances from the commercial units.

“Live/work” units also can provide residential spaces in a mixed-use district. A live/work unit is defined as a single unit where both business activities occur and a dwelling area is provided. The residence is typically occupied by a person responsible for the work performed on the premises. The unit should have the elements of a dwelling unit, including a kitchen and a bathroom. Often, these buildings have commercial exteriors. This differs from a mixed-use building since both the residential and commercial components are in the same unit. This also differs from a home occupation in that there are fewer restrictions on the type and extent of the commercial use.

8.2 Building Height, Setbacks, Buffering & Compatibility

Since a mixed-use district includes both residential and commercial uses permitted in close proximity to one another, it is necessary to minimize conflicts that may occur between neighboring properties with different land uses.

Height

Controlling the relative height of adjacent buildings is the primary means of improving compatibility between different uses. A multi-story building might create light and privacy problems for a smaller building next to it. A block with buildings that are all the same height can have a uniform, austere look. Varied heights appear more casual and spontaneous. The maximum height proposed for the Mixed-Use Zoning District in the Southwest Downtown Plan Area is three stories, not to exceed fifty feet. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Land Use), additional restrictions apply to development adjacent to existing single-family residences. See page 8-5 for specific examples of compatibility issues relating to existing single-family uses.

Setbacks

A setback is the required distance between the structure and the property line. Setbacks apply to all sides of a building and create an element of control over the density and character of development. Minimum setbacks are also established for safety purposes such as to prevent the spread of fire. Attached buildings must be separated by an appropriate fireproof wall. These common-wall buildings are often found in traditional architecture in the forms of attached storefronts and row houses. Setbacks can also be used to ease the transition between adjacent buildings of different scales or conflicting uses.



Orenco Town Center, Hillsboro, Oregon

Figure 8.7: The visual bulk of this three-story building is minimized by its height, variation in the wall plane and open ground floor.



Crawford Square, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Figure 8.8: Variation in height and massing add interest and informality to a streetscape.



American Can, Baltimore, Maryland

Figure 8.9: An appropriate setback creates harmony between offices of different scales (and an outdoor courtyard).



Figure 8.10: Buffers need not be large to be effective. The front yard of this house would be undefined without this simple picket fence.



Bayou Place, Houston, Texas

Figure 8.11: A restaurant with outdoor seating can be an asset to a neighborhood – if it's at a reasonable scale.



Seattle, Washington

Figure 8.12: The building on the left was built in 1993 of economical modern materials, but complements its historical neighbor's orientation, setback and proportions.

Buffering

Specific design elements may be required in order to improve the compatibility between different uses. Some of the more common buffering methods include landscaping requirements, sound walls, or other specific building design requirements. Buffering elements provide interest and protection for small spaces.

Compatibility

Compatibility is the ability of land uses to exist in harmonious or congenial combination. The main compatibility issue in a mixed-use district exists between single-family residences and other land uses. Compatibility standards are development measures necessary for a new use moving in next to an existing disparate use. The most common conflicts that may arise have to do with the differences in the size of buildings on adjacent lots, noise and traffic generation, hours of operation, and possible odors.

In order to improve compatibility in the Plan Area, buildings located next to existing detached single-family residences should meet additional requirements which will be listed in the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance. Examples of these requirements could include:

- Setting the new structure at least five feet from the neighboring property line and maintaining a minimum ten-foot separation between structures at the sides
- Creating a standard limiting the height of a building that abuts a single-family residence
- Requiring translucent glass on any windows that face an existing single-family residence
- Developing a standard for fences requiring a finished face abutting existing single-family residences
- Recommending that a new use that abuts an existing single-family residential use not have a full commercial kitchen. Uses with limited kitchens, such as coffee houses or sandwich shops could still be permitted.

Another compatibility issue between land uses is the privacy of residents of the Plan Area. Privacy is not necessarily improved with distance from another use. Deeper setbacks often offer a more direct view into a neighboring unit. A residence located close to the street can improve its privacy by raising the main living area so pedestrians cannot look directly in a window at the street level. When uses are in close proximity to one another, translucent side windows can provide increased privacy. Common fireproof walls, as are required between row-houses, offer greater privacy between residential units than houses with standard side setbacks.

8.3 Lighting, Landscaping & Sign Design Elements

Lighting

The positioning and location of light fixtures is important to ensure safety while simultaneously protecting residences from excessive light overflow. Light overflow can be prevented by arranging fixtures to deflect light away from residential areas. Lighting should also be oriented so that direct glare or excessive illumination onto the street does not interfere with the vision of drivers. Fixtures should be small, shielded and directed toward the building rather than toward the street to minimize glare for pedestrians as well.

The design and materials of lighting fixtures should be consistent with the character of the Plan Area. Fully recessed downlights, gooseneck lights or other incandescent fixtures appropriate to the style of a building are preferable. Incandescent white light is encouraged. Exposed conduits are discouraged. For street and parking lot lights, the height of fixtures should be low enough to prevent the overflow of light onto adjacent properties. As mentioned in the previous chapter, antique style lampposts are planned for the Plan Area's street lighting.



22nd Street, Austin, Texas

Figure 8.13: The developer of these condominiums linked three large old houses with structures that are recessed and painted gray to blend into the background. Looking down the street the connecting structures between the original buildings are almost undetectable.



New Roc City, New Rochelle, New York



CityPlace, West Palm Beach, Florida

Figure 8.14: Appropriate lighting illuminates the shop fronts and pedestrian areas, the store signs and the architectural features of the building.



Seattle, Washington

Figure 8.15: Even a small landscape area softens the edge of a parking lot considerably.



Palo Alto, California

Figure 8.16: A “Hollywood drive” (with a planting strip between tire paths) is less obtrusive than a full-width driveway.



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas



Bowie Town Center, Bowie, Maryland

Figure 8.17: These shops use signs on their facades, awnings and umbrellas, all of which are small enough to engage the passing pedestrian.

Landscaping

Landscaping is recommended to accent building entries and to screen the perimeter of parking lots and structured garage parking. Plant materials can be used to soften hard building lines and reduce the appearance of building bulk. Additional landscaping may be desired on the part of a property owner or tenant to create a buffer between two uses. Landscaping standards will be included in the proposed Mixed-Use Ordinance.

In other zoning districts, tree planting is required in the street yard. Because of the extensive nature of the street tree plantings in the Street Improvement Plan discussed in Chapter 4 (Streets & Circulation), it may be appropriate to consider that street trees be credited towards the required street yard plantings. The need for a unified streetscape appearance will require coordination of timing of street tree planting. The location of street trees is determined by the Street Improvement Plan.

Signs

Signs should be in harmony with the style and character of a building. They are an integral design component of the building architecture, building materials, landscaping and overall site development. The City has an existing sign ordinance with which all signs must comply. The City also has an additional sign ordinance which applies to all signs for buildings with historic zoning. The size and design specifications in the City’s historic sign ordinance are better suited for the Plan Area because of the scale and attention to design that is desired in the Plan Area. The Planning and Community Development Department anticipates making some modifications to this ordinance in the near future to make it more user-friendly. Revisions may increase the potential for well-made and creatively designed signs. This Plan recommends that the Signs for Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks Ordinance be amended to include the Southwest Downtown Plan Area within its purview.

8.4 Development of a Pedestrian-Friendly Neighborhood

To encourage the development of a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, emphasis should be placed on the orientation of buildings, walkways and landscape amenities to enhance the safety and convenience of pedestrian movement. Site and landscape designs should incorporate outdoor pedestrian use areas with amenities such as trellises, shade trees, raised planters, and landscaped berms to create useable, inviting, semi-protected areas. Public courtyards and plazas should be visible from street corridors and major pedestrian access routes to encourage their use and ensure safety.

As mentioned in Chapter 7 (Civic Design), design standards to be incorporated into the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance may include:

- Allowing construction to the front or side property line
- Prohibiting parking in the street yard
- Discouraging new curb cuts for individual driveways, which would interfere with pedestrian traffic
- Requiring a certain degree of transparency in the form of windows and openings on the ground floor of buildings
- Requiring periodic offsets and changes in a façades of large buildings to maintain pedestrian scale
- Encouraging building façade detail such as awnings, to add visual interest
- Encouraging the illumination of a building's façade to highlight architectural details.

Regardless of its height, a building's ground level, including wall and window heights, should be human-scaled in order to create comfortable pedestrian areas at the street level. Store display windows and landscaping provides visual interest for pedestrians. Signage on buildings can also be oriented to pedestrians.



Downtown Palo Alto, California

Figure 8.18: The openness of the shop on the ground floor of this building is interesting and inviting to the pedestrian.



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 8.19: Outdoor seating areas bring activity to the street, making the street a place to linger, as well as to pass through.



Seattle, Washington

Figure 8.20: Sidewalks are improved with benches and seating areas (which can be incorporated into landscaping features).



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 8.21: The entrance to this public parking garage does not interrupt the surrounding streetscape.



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 8.22: Street trees create a separation between pedestrian and auto areas, while providing shade for both.

New or renovated buildings, especially those with first floor retail, should front with windows and entryways to the street. This is particularly true on West Main Street where it has been suggested by Carter Design Associates (the consultants who completed the design guidelines study for the Southwest Downtown Plan Area – see Appendix A, Land Use Analysis) to build to the front property line where possible, in order to mirror the development of East Main Street. Grouping commercial buildings will also create pedestrian zones where people can visit shops, restaurants and services without getting back into their vehicles. In addition, buildings could be designed so they do not have driveways and parking areas that interrupt the continuity of the streetscape.

Creating a physical separation between vehicular and pedestrian movement, wherever possible, is important when creating a pedestrian-friendly streetscape. Parking areas should have limited street frontage. Additionally, retail and other uses with significant pedestrian traffic and street frontage should not be interrupted by driveways. Safe pedestrian access should be provided to the entrances of commercial uses from the street or from nearby parking.

With respect to the streetscape, street trees provide shade for pedestrians. Benches, trash receptacles, and bicycle racks can be provided for use by pedestrians and cyclists. Lighting should also be provided for pedestrians during evening hours. These elements lend scale and character to a pedestrian area and encourage the use of the street.

8.5 Development that Meets Proposed Standards of Design

The photographs included in this chapter provide examples of development that may meet proposed standards of design in a mixed-use zoning district, but they are not meant to dictate a particular architectural style.



Downtown Palo Alto, California



Atomic City, Austin, Texas

Figure 8.23: Retail in residentially scaled buildings is approachable and inviting.



Orenco Station, Hillsboro, Oregon



McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas

Figure 8.24: The facades of these large buildings are divided into vertical segments to bring their visual bulk down to a pedestrian scale.



Santa Cruz, California



(center and right) McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas



Figure 8.25: Drawing a distinction between the ground and upper floors with an awning, moldings, or even a change in color, frames the sidewalk's area and relates even tall buildings to the pedestrian scale.



(left and right) Addison Circle, Addison, Texas



Figure 8.26: This outdoor eating area, shown in both photos, is clearly separated from the sidewalk by a low wall and grille.



(left and center) Addison Circle, Addison, Texas



McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas

Figure 8.27: Street trees shelter pedestrian areas, making both residential and commercial streets more inviting.

Figure 8.28: Small, intimate courtyards can be tucked into small outdoor spaces such as between buildings.



Santa Cruz, California



Seattle, Washington

Figure 8.29: Larger courtyards create inviting public spaces.



CityPlace, West Palm Beach, Florida



26 Doors Shopping Center, Austin, Texas

Figure 8.30: Street furniture such as benches and planters distinguish areas for vehicles and pedestrians, walkers and browsers.



McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas



(center & right) Addison Circle, Addison, Texas



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas



McKinney Avenue, Dallas, Texas

Figure 8.31: Pocket parks provide green space, inviting the passerby to pause away from the activity of the street.



(left and right) Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

8.6 Design Recommendations

Summary

- Incorporate design standards to minimize land use conflicts that may occur between neighboring properties.
- Ensure that landscaping, signage, and light fixture design reflect the recommendations provided in the Plan.
- Encourage the development of a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, with emphasis on the orientation of buildings, walkways and landscape amenities to enhance the safety and convenience of pedestrian movement.
- Ensure that outdoor pedestrian use areas include amenities such as trellises, shade trees, raised planters, and landscaped berms to create inviting outdoor areas.
- Adopt a mixed-use zoning district that reflects the proposed design standards presented in the Southwest Downtown Plan.